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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, it is recognized that accreditation by a nationally reputed accreditation association can improve the delivery of quality child care services through compliance with nationally recognized standards of best practice. This report examines the accreditation processes of four nationally recognized organizations: (1) National Association for the Education of Young Children; (2) National Early Childhood Program Accreditation system; (3) National Association for Family Child Care; and (4) Council of Accreditation for Services to Families and Children. The report compares the process by which accreditation is achieved for each organization and the standards by which each organization measures quality to grant accreditation. The report also summarizes research on the impact of accreditation on the improvement of quality service delivered over time. In addition, the report examines early childhood program standards that have had the greatest impact on early childhood education. It is organized into seven major sections to cover the following topics: (1) introduction; (2) overview on early childhood program accreditation process; (3) licensing and funding in relationship to accreditation; (4) descriptions of four early childhood accreditation processes; (5) comparison of the four accreditation processes; (6) review of the standards of the Child Welfare League of America, American Public Health Association/American Academy of Pediatrics, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, and Head Start; and (7) discussion of the strengths and limitations of various accreditation approaches. The report concludes by noting that each of the accreditation processes examined is substantially similar. (KB)

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Assuring Quality in Early Childhood Settings:

A Report on Accreditation Processes and Quality Standards

Report by Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth for Child Care Matters

Child Care matters.

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I. Introduction

Child care has emerged from the shadows as a necessity in our society. It plays an important role in helping welfare reform succeed, in readying young children for school and mastery of reading and math, in spurring business growth and development, and in providing children with tools that help them avoid crime and delinquincy and make productive contributions to society. More that a decade of research also reminds us that most child care does not serve our children very well, even though each year brings an increasing number of children into child care settings. Already more than 60 percent of young children will be enrolled in a child care program prior to entering Kindergarten. Child care quality is positively related to children's school success and achievement. "Children's cognitive and social development are positively related to the quality of their child care experiences" (Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995).

Even with so many children in child care, child care as we know it today operates in a minimally regulated market with little consumer protection and government oversight. States provide a licensing framework designed to provide a minimum floor for safety, rather than a focus on quality, school readiness, and child development; combined federal and state resources assist a modest number of working parents with purchasing child care. Thus, efforts to improve child care quality are largely focused on non-regulatory methods and increased public-private investments in child care.

Accreditation as an Approach to Quality Improvement in Child Care

The growing body of knowledge about the impact from good child care--coupled with the market-driven, non-regulatory framework for child care--has increased interest in effective and efficient methods for improving quality in child care. Accreditation by a nationally reputed accreditation association is an accepted method for recognizing and improving the delivery of quality child care services through "(compliance) with nationally recognized standards of best practice" (COA, 1999a, p. 3). A 1995 study by Families and Work Institute confirmed that accreditation improves quality of care provided in early childhood environments (Dombro & Modigliani, 1995).

The landmark 1995 Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study showed that accredited child care sites are associated with higher quality (Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995). Ensuring the provision of quality service in an early childhood setting is difficult to do, as the definition of quality is elusive and represents a wide spectrum of characteristics. There are many different standards of excellence, philosophies of education, and types of care settings. Accreditation organizations' published standards and accreditation processes bring some ease to the quality assurance dilemma.

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This report examines the accreditation processes of four nationally recognized organizations:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation system (NECPA)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
- Council of Accreditation for Services to Families and Children (COA)

We examine the process by which accreditation is achieved, and the standards by which the organization measures quality to grant accreditation. Research on the impact of accreditation on the improvement of quality service delivered over time is also included. A comparison of accreditation processes and standards is also provided.

Early Childhood Program Standards

Accreditation is a voluntary pursuit on the part of an early child care program. A contrasting approach to accreditation is self-evaluation of quality of service via other accepted early childhood environment standards. The standards that have had the greatest impact on the early childhood education field are examined in this paper:

- Child Welfare League of America's (CWLA) Standards for Excellence in Child Day Care Services
- American Association of Pediatrics and American Public Health Association's (AAP/APHA) National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), developed by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A review of Head Start standards is also included. It should be noted that the standards for Head Start are regulated requirements for all Head Start/Early Head Start centers. They are included because they represent a benchmark that must be met by over 37,000 early childhood programs, serving more than 751,000 children in the United States (Head Start, 1999).

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Organization of this Report

This report is organized into seven major sections to provide an overview, comparison and analysis of the major accreditation approaches for child care. The two-fold purpose of this paper is to:

1) describe and explain the purpose of accreditation, the specific requirements of the various accreditation processes, the standards used for each accreditation process, and the research base for each accreditation process;

2) compare the accreditation processes and standards, analyzing whether the accreditation processes are substantially similar as means for improving quality in child care.

We start Section II with an overview on early childhood program accreditation processes, followed by a section (Section III) reviewing licensing and funding in relationship to accreditation.

Descriptions of the four major early childhood accreditation processes, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, National Association of Family Child Care Foundation, and Council of Accreditation for Services to Families and Children, are found in Section IV. These descriptions review each step of the individual accreditation process. We provide an overview of the standards used and a summary of available impact research for each accreditation approach.

Section V compares the four accreditation processes in-depth along many different variables. This section is designed to be used as a stand-alone primer on early childhood program accreditation processes. Section V provides far more detailed information about each of the standards that programs must meet to become accredited, and compares the standards of each accrediting program to those of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The NAEYC standards were selected as comparison standards because they have been the most thoroughly tested, and are known to have an impact on improving quality in early childhood programs.

Section VI reviews the contents of the standards of CWLA, AAP/APHA, ECERS, and Head Start. The standards, although they do not require independent verification and sign-off, as does accreditation, are nonetheless useful in helping to understand other approaches to quality improvement in child care.

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The seventh and final section, Comments and Conclusions, discusses the strengths and limitations of the various accreditation approaches, and provides our conclusions about the comparability of the accrediting approaches. Although there are important variations in these approaches, we conclude that each of the accreditation processes examined is substantially similar.

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II. Accreditation: An Overview

Seeking accreditation is a voluntary action on the part of a child care program. Doing so signifies a program's desire to ensure that it is operating under the highest quality accepted practices of the child care industry. These standards are based on the assumption that the program seeking accreditation is licensed in accordance with state and local regulations.

In general, accreditation has three steps:

1. Self-study or self-observation,
2. Visit from a representative(s) of the accreditation association,
3. Committee decision based upon reports from the first two steps.

Each accreditation organization uses its own terms to describe these steps. During the first step, the program uses the accreditation association's standards to determine it's current compliance with these standards. The self-study provides initial feedback for the program to embark on a quality improvement plan to better comply with the respective association's accreditation standards. When a program has made the necessary improvements, it arranges for a site-visit to be made by representatives from the accreditation association. These visitors are volunteers with an established experience in early childhood, who provide their objective observations on how accurately the program described its efforts to meet the accreditation standards. The observers send a report back to the accreditation association, where a committee makes a final decision on whether to grant accreditation.

The fees associated with the accreditation process vary; the range for the associations described is $425 to more than $10,000. Fees are collected at various points in the process, including the time of application, initial accreditation, and during the accreditation maintenance period.

Research has shown that programs participating in voluntary accreditation have an increased likelihood of achieving higher quality in their classrooms (Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995), "not only in those centers with lower preaccreditation quality of care, but also in initially high-quality centers" (Zellman & Johansen, 1996, p. 29).

The development of accreditation standards and processes has contributed to a clearer definition of quality in the services of early childhood programs as well as to improved perceptions of work climate by child care staff (Bloom, 1996).

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III. Platforms to Achieving Accreditation: Licensing and Funding

Licensing

The most basic requirement for early childhood settings is state licensing and registration. Licensing seeks to ensure basic safety by enforcing requirements for physical space, teacher-child ratios, transportation, and staff qualifications (Sciarra & Dorsey, 1990). Licensing is the floor upon which quality assurance is built and evaluated.

The effect of licensing has been a topic of quality assurance research and literature in early childhood environments. The Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study found that "states with more demanding licensing standards have fewer poor-quality centers" and "centers that comply with additional standards beyond those required for licensing provide higher quality services" (Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995, p. 38).

In 1969, Norris Class proposed that quality assurance in child care be understood in terms of levels. Gwen Morgan, a leading early childhood licensing and regulations researcher, subsequently refined Class' work, suggesting that varying levels of regulatory and non-regulatory components interact to produce quality in care (Morgan, 1996). (See Appendix B for a re-creation of the diagram that accompanies this description.)

Licensing has a crucial role in the regulatory branch, along with safety and health regulations and zoning, as the base of quality assurance. The next tier in the regulatory branch deals with funding and fiscal regulation. The next level of the regulatory branch is credentialing--certifying that all staff members in a center have received the appropriate training to work in a child care setting. At the top of the regulatory branch, Morgan identifies accreditation as a method to ensure a higher level of quality. "Were there such a method widely in place, those who were only licensed might be less likely to wave their licenses on high as banners of quality since a license is merely permission to operate" (Morgan, 1979, p. 26).

Morgan's non-regulatory methods for assuring quality center around the theme of making information and training on quality more readily available to the public and to early childhood professionals. These approaches include: public education, training of caregivers and administrators, association membership, newsletters, books and journals, consultation with other professionals, and development of resources and referral centers (Morgan, 1979).

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Funding

Funding itself can play a role in level of quality service provided by a center. The Cost, Quality and Outcomes study found that programs with greater funds were more likely to be of higher quality (Cost, Quality & Outcomes Study Team, 1995). Outside operational funds, be they government, corporate, or private grant monies, can be restricted with the stipulation that a program meet certain quality levels to receive funds. In her research, Morgan calls this fiscal regulation (Morgan, 1979).

It should be noted that the profit status of a program is not dispositive. Kagan and Newton conducted a study in Connecticut to determine whether there were significant differences in quality between for-profit, non-profit and government non-profit centers. Overall, they did not find many differences in the delivery of quality services between non-profit and for-profit centers. Non-profits and for-profits were similar on program goals, curricular activities, group sizes and contact with parents. In a few categories (promoting child's self-concept and group management) non-profits ranked higher at providing quality. This difference was not significant enough to deem non-profits as "better at achieving quality" than for-profits (Kagan & Newton, 1989).

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IV. Accreditation Approaches

A. *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) accreditation process is the oldest, most widely known of those in early childhood. It is aimed to assure that quality is provided in a developmentally appropriate setting. Established in 1985, NAEYC's accreditation program has been referred to as "developmentally optimal" in achieving quality in early childhood settings (Phillips, Lande, & Goldberg, 1990). Over 6,000 centers were NAEYC accredited and over 12,000 were in the accreditation process as of Fall 1998 (NAEYC, 1999).

The NAEYC accreditation process was developed with two goals in mind: "(1) to help program personnel become involved in a process that will facilitate real and lasting improvements in the quality of the program and (2) to evaluate the quality of the program for the purpose of accrediting those programs that demonstrate substantial compliance with criteria for high quality" (Bredekamp & Glowacki, 1996, p. 2). The process was initiated in 1980 because the United States would not institute high-quality, national licensing standards, as created by the Federal Interagency Day Care Commission (Howes & Galinsky, 1996). Accreditation criteria and procedures were developed with "systematic review and input by...thousands of early childhood professionals" (Bredekamp & Glowacki, 1996, p. 3), published for review in *Young Children* (NAEYC's journal), and field-tested at four sites in California, Texas, Florida, and Minnesota.

The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (NAECP) administers the accreditation process for NAEYC, and programs must be operational for at least one year before they can begin the accreditation process (NAEYC, 1999). The three-step process consists of: self-study, validation and commission decision. The time to complete entire process will vary, as each center will take differing amounts of time to complete the self-study (NAEYC, 1991). Quality is measured by objectively examining ratios and teacher preparation in early childhood education, the understanding of and accommodations for Developmentally Appropriate Practice, and regular staff reflection and evaluation of the program. In addition, qualitative evaluations of the early childhood environment take place to measure the happiness and interactions of the children, developmentally appropriate expectations by adults of children, and the welcoming and encouraging of parental involvement (NAEYC, 1999).

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NAEYC Accreditation--Classifications and Fees

NAEYC classifies centers into levels according to the size of the child population served. These classifications drive the fee structure for accreditation. Table 1 outlines these classifications and fees.

Table 1--NAEYC Fee Structure for Accreditation

	Number of Children Served	Application	Validation	Total
Level 1	60 or fewer	$125	$300	$425
Level 2	61-120	$200	$450	$650
Level 3	121-240	$250	$575	$825
Level 4	241 or more	$300	$700	$1,000

NAEYC, 1998

NAEYC Accreditation Process, Step 1--Self-Study

The first part of the three-part NAEYC accreditation, the self-study, requires a center to complete several inventories gathering information to measure the quality of their program along the dimensions posed in NAEYC's definition of a high quality program. NAEYC defines a high quality early childhood program as one that "meets the needs of and promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of the children and adults--parents, staff, and administrators--who are involved in the program" (NAEYC, 1991, p. 11). The process begins with a self-study because it allows centers to take an honest look at the program as it operates today (NAEYC, 1998a). The self-study is broken into three steps:

- introducing the concept of accreditation to the staff and parents,
- collecting information on the program,
- planning for improvements and changes where deemed necessary.

After the introduction of the process, center staff begins collecting data and measuring quality via four tools: classroom observations, administration and center profiles, staff questionnaires, parent questionnaires. A program description, which summarizes the profiles and the classroom observations, is prepared. The tools cover a number of appropriate sub-criteria addressed in NAECP's ten major standards areas. These areas are:

1. Interactions among teachers and children
2. Curriculum
3. Relationships among teachers and families

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4. Staff qualifications and professional development
5. Administration
6. Staffing
7. Physical environment
8. Health and safety
9. Nutrition and food service
10. Evaluation (continuous self-evaluation).

Each area has a specific goal with a rationale, and sub-criteria to be met.

NAEYC Standard Example

The goal for the first major area of assessment is: "Interactions between children and staff provide opportunities for children to develop an understanding of self and others and are characterized by warmth, personal respect, individuality positive support, and responsiveness. Teachers facilitate interactions among children to provide opportunities for development of self-esteem, social competence, and intellectual growth" (NAEYC, 1998, p. 17).

The first criterion related to this area is "Teachers interact frequently with children showing affection, interest, and respect" (NAEYC, 1998a, p. 29). Five observable behaviors are identified for this criterion, two of which are: "Teachers interact non-verbally by smiling, touching, holding" and "Teachers talk with and listen to individual children during activities...and routines" (NAEYC, 1998a, p. 29). Based upon an observation of these behaviors, this criterion is rated as Not Met (1), Partially Met (2), or Fully Met (3).

A checklist is kept for every classroom observed in the center. When data from all of the classrooms has been collected, all of the ratings for this and other criteria are calculated to determine an average for the overall goal of interactions. NAEYC provides a handbook to aid in this process with checklists and observable behaviors for all goals. The handbook contains specific steps for measuring all criteria in the self-study.

Based on the findings of the self-study, center personnel determine that they are prepared to move on to the next step in the process, validation, or that they need to embark on a quality improvement plan to adequately meet the NAEYC standards on which their ratings were low. "When improvements are complete, personnel decide whether to go on and seek accreditation.

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Programs involved in self-study are not committed to seek accreditation. The administrator may decide that the self-study is sufficient to meet personal goals for program evaluation and improvement, or that the program's compliance with the Criteria is inadequate to seek accreditation" (NAEYC, 1998, p. 6). Those centers that choose to continue in the process prepare the results of the self-study in a formal report, called the Program Description, that is returned to the Academy for review.

NAEYC Accreditation Process, Step 2--Validation

Validation is the next step in the NAEYC accreditation process. In this step, a trained validator (or validators, for larger centers) makes a visit to the center to verify the reported Program Description from the self-study. The length of the visit depends on the size of the program. The number of validators and days of the visit are designated as follows:

Level 1	Fewer than 60 children	1 validator, 1 day
Level 2	61-120 Children	1 validator, 2 days or 2 validators, 1 day
Level 3	121-240 Children	2 validators, 2 days or 3 validators, 1 day
Level 4	More than 240 children	3 validators, 2 days

NAEYC, 1998

Validators are highly qualified early childhood professionals with an educational background and work experience in the field. As well, their personal characteristics must include strong communication skills and objectivity. Validators are assigned to visit centers that are within a 100-mile radius of their homes (NAEYC, 1998a). NAEYC trains all validators in the tasks and procedures of this portion of the accreditation process. Validation allows for an objective observation to be made to verify the program description of daily operations.

While onsite, the validator has several tasks to complete:

- an observation visit to at least 50% of the groups in a program to validate the Classroom Observation Summaries;
- an accuracy-check of the administrative criteria (checking evidence, documents, and a sampling of the Family and Teach-Staff Questionnaires);
- and an interview with the program director to discuss the director's and validator's comments on the Criteria and Program Description, as well as to address any nonvalidated criteria.

Validation simply refers to consistency between the program's self-rating and the validator's observations. A criterion could be nonvalidated because the validator assigns that criterion a higher rating than did the program. It is up to the Commission to deem that criterion

as being Fully Met. It is not necessary for all criteria to be validated to achieve accreditation. The Guide to Accreditation (NAEYC, 1998a) provides all the specific guidelines that must be met for the various observations and questionnaires to receive validation.

NAEYC Accreditation Process, Step 3--Commission Decision

The final step in the NAEYC accreditation process is the commission decision. Commissions meet at the end of every month in Washington, DC (NAEYC, 1998). "Accreditation decisions are made by a combination of internal and external Commission review" (NAEYC, 1998a, p. 273). First, an internal team of Academy staff reviews the programs being considered for accreditation. Then, external commissioners, appointed by the NAEYC Governing Board, review the preliminary decisions made by the internal team. All commissioners review the accreditation case blind to the name and location of the center to ensure objectivity. The commission team reviews the materials completed by the program and the validator(s). "Accreditation decisions are based on substantial compliance and rely on professional judgment rather than a point system" (NAEYC, 1998a, p. 273). Although there is no point system in evaluating compliance with NAECP's standards, some standards are more important than others. The greatest emphasis is placed on the following components:

- Interactions among children and teachers
- Curriculum
- Health and safety
- Group size and ratios
- Staff qualifications and development (NAEYC, 1998a).

If a program is not granted accreditation, it is deferred. The deferred programs have two options to pursue. They may choose to make necessary changes specified in the deferral decision, essentially moving back to the end of the self-study process. This will require another on-site validation before the commission would review the center again for accreditation. Alternatively, if a center believes that it was deferred unfairly, it can make an appeal to the commission to have a second committee review its case (NAEYC, 1991).

NAEYC Accreditation--Terms and Reaccreditation

Programs are granted accreditation for a three year period. During that period, a program is required to submit an annual report to advise the Academy of any changes that have taken place in the organization (such as staff turnover and improvements made), as well as compliance with annual requirements (such as staff evaluations). At the end of the second year of accreditation, programs seeking reaccreditation must apply for this status with the Academy. The reaccreditation process mirrors the process of initial accreditation.

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NAEYC Accreditation--Impact Research

In a 1997 study of NAEYC accreditation on the quality of pre-school programs, 92 centers were studied. These centers had either achieved accreditation, participated in the self-study but did not proceed, or not sought accreditation. The main finding of the research indicated that "centers that achieve NAEYC accreditation demonstrate higher overall classroom quality...and show greater improvement in overall quality ratings, staff-child ratios and teacher sensitivity scores, than do centers (participating) in the self-study but (not advancing) to the validation phase" (Whitebook, Sakai, & Howes, 1997, p. 37). Centers that participated in the self-study portion of the NAEYC accreditation process demonstrated improvement in quality over those who did not seek participate in the accreditation process at all. "Non-profit status, higher wages paid to teaching staff, and the retention of skilled teachers, in combination with NAEYC accreditation are predictors of high quality in...centers" (Whitebook, Sakai, & Howes, 1997, p. 43). Researchers commented that "NAEYC accreditation can make an important contribution to centers attempting to enhance their services, but making quality improvements that are sustainable over time will also require systematically addressing the compensation of child care staff" (Whitebook, Sakai, & Howes, 1997, p. 66).

In a 1996 study of the implementation of NAEYC accreditation at one corporate day care center, researchers found that the accreditation process "had a significant effect on the quality of the early childhood setting and on children's development at the...child development center" (Howes & Galinsky, 1996, p. 58). Observations and measurements occurred in the areas of ratios and group size, global quality (in caregiving and activities), teacher style, adult involvement, and attachment security at three intervals over a four-year period. The first data collection took place shortly after the center opened, the second a year-and-a half later, mid-way through the accreditation process, and the third shortly after NAEYC accreditation was achieved (approximately three-and-a half years after the first collection).

Another 1996 study focused on the effects of NAEYC accreditation in military child development centers. Data were collected via a mail survey from 245 military center directors to analyze the accreditation process, the effect of accreditation on the staff, the effect of accreditation on child outcomes, and the incremental value of accreditation over the benefits associated with certification from the Department of Defense (Zellman & Johansen, 1996). Major benefits reported as a result of accreditation were (in order of significance) higher staff morale, better defined goals for the centers, higher quality care, and more innovative or child-centered programs. "It was not possible to directly measure the effect of accreditation on child outcome, but there is little doubt that accreditation improves the quality of care provided" (Zellman & Johansen, 1996, p. 29).

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B. National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)

National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA) is an accreditation system developed in the early 1990's via a partnership between the National Child Care Association (NCCA) and Dr. Richard Fiene of the Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg. NCCA is a professional trade association "representing the specific interests of the licensed, private childcare and education community" (NCCA, 1999). NCCA sought to develop a "user-friendly, efficient, affordable system" that was capable of "(validating) quality while incorporating state-of-the-art technology" (White, 1994, p. 1). The NECPA system was developed to provide accreditation to all different types of child care facilities that exist.

Currently, there are 80 fully accredited programs, and about 300 in the process of achieving accreditation (S. Grace). The accreditation system consists of a self-study, a verification visit, and a council and commission decision. The criteria upon which accreditation is based were developed as a combination of NAEYC standards and those of the American Public Health Association/American Academy of Pediatrics (APHA/AAP's *National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-Of-Home Child Care Programs*).

NECPA's accreditation process is based on a key indicator system researched and developed by Dr. Fiene. To date, 29 key indicators of quality in early childhood education programs have been identified. Key indicators are used to produce observable items in the self-study and verification processes (NECPA, 1996). "In the development of any indicator checklist system, a comprehensive set of standards must be used...the NECPA system used...the NAEYC accreditation criteria" (Fiene, 1996). The presence of a key quality indicator is generally indicative of other quality standards existing in any given child care environment.

NECPA's accreditation process evaluates a program using fewer criteria than that of NAEYC. This is possible because the criteria are composed of key indicators that "statistically predict compliance with all of NAEYC's criteria" (Fiene, 1996, p. 62). In a review of use of the indicator method in accreditation, Dr. Fiene noted that "the indicator checklist (NECPA) can never replace the comprehensive instrument (NAEYC)" (Fiene, 1996, p. 61). This does not mean that the NECPA system does not accurately identify high quality programs, or that it cannot be used stand-alone, in lieu of NAEYC accreditation. Because the NECPA system is based upon NAEYC criteria, it must be validated in comparison to NAEYC standards on a regular basis.

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NECPA Accreditation--Fee Structure

NECPA's accreditation fees are based upon program size and are collected in two payments. The initial payment is made upon applying for accreditation, and the second payment is made between the self-assessment and the verification visit. The fee structure works as follows:

Table 2--**NECPA Fee Structure for Accreditation**

Children Served	Application	Verification	Total
7-120	$300	$350+ expenses up to $250	$650-$900
121-240	$350	$450+ expenses up to $250	$800-$1025
241 or more	$400	$550+ expenses up to $250	$950-$1200

NCCA--1999

NECPA Accreditation--Step 1, Self-Evaluation

During the self-evaluation, an organization gathers demographic and identifying information and completes a self-evaluative questionnaire. Surveys are included for completion by parents and staff. There is a more subjective component that is completed by making observations and reporting on them in a questionnaire format. The items in the self-evaluative questionnaire and the observations generally require yes or no responses, without commentary on the extent to which compliance with an item is or is not met. NECPA's standards are divided into eight major components:

1. Administration and general operations
2. Professional development and work environment
3. Indoor environment
4. Outdoor environment
5. Developmental program
6. Parent and community involvement
7. Formal school linkages
8. Health and safety

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NECPA Standard Example

An example of an item from the observational checklist under the Developmental Program heading is number 111-34: "Are developmentally appropriate materials of sufficient quantity and variety available for each child?" (NECPA, 1996, p. 109). The response for this and all other observational items is simply "Yes" or "No".

During the completion of the self-evaluation, an organization should make any necessary improvements NECPA accreditation would require.

NECPA Accreditation--Step 2, Verification

The next step in the process is verification. Based on the number of children served and the size of the facilities, one or more verifiers make an on-site visit for one to three days to review the self-study results with the same instrument the organization used during the first phase of accreditation. Verifiers are volunteers with director experience in the early childhood field, who have undergone relevant training from NECPA. NECPA is implementing a pilot program with one salaried verifier. The aim is to bring more consistency to the verifiers' observations, and to make the verifier more readily available to visit centers when they have completed the self-evaluation (S. Grace).

During the verification visit, the verifier reviews the evaluative checklist completed by the program during the self-evaluation, marking each item as "Verified" or "Not Verified". The verified checklist and the supporting documents are sent to NECPA headquarters, where a narrative profile of the center's compliance with NECPA standards is developed. This report highlights the program's strengths and opportunities for improvement. Opportunities for improvement are areas in which a program is out of compliance with NECPA standards. The narrative profile is delivered to the National Accreditation Council for a preliminary accreditation decision (S. Grace).

NECPA Accreditation--Step 3, National Accreditation Council and NECPA Commission Decision

The National Accreditation Council is a nine-person committee that provides an initial review of a program's accreditation materials and the narrative report. Council members receive the information on individual centers several weeks prior to meeting as a group. Group meetings are held to determine accreditation recommendations to be sent to the NECPA Commission. Accreditation recommendations must be unanimous (S. Grace).

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The NECPA Commission consists of eleven members who make the final accreditation decision based on Council recommendations. The Commission has several options: full accreditation, a deferral, pending accreditation, or denial of accreditation. Full accreditation is not necessarily based upon full compliance with all NECPA standards. The Commission can decide to accredit when a vast majority of critical standards are met. Unmet standards are expected to be met during the accreditation period (S. Grace).

In a deferral situation, the program has failed to comply with too many critical NECPA standards. The program is sent the narrative profile with the opportunities for improvement, and has 60 days to reply to the Commission with a plan of action. Programs receive a decision of "pending" when the Commission is unclear on information provided by the verifiers (S. Grace).

Programs are only denied accreditation when they have been deferred and have not responded with an action plan to make quality improvements to meet NECPA standards (S. Grace).

NECPA Accreditation--Terms and Reaccreditation

Full NECPA accreditation is valid for three years. During the accreditation period, programs must submit an annual report to NECPA, detailing how they have maintained or improved quality standards. The program is required to report any major structural or systematic changes that occur as well, such as staff turnover or policy changes.

The reaccreditation process is the same as the initial accreditation process. A program must undergo a self-evaluation, a verification visit, and a decision by the NECPA Commission (S. Grace).

NECPA Accreditation--Impact Research

At this time, there is no known research that has measured the impact of NECPA's accreditation process on overall quality or consistent improvements in quality (S. Grace). However, Dr. Fiene conducts an annual internal tracking study to compare the programs initiating the accreditation process with those previously accredited. This research suggests that over time, programs new to accreditation are more easily meeting NECPA standards than those that began the accreditation process when the process was newer (Fiene, 1993).

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C. National Association of Family Child Care Foundation (NAFCC)

The National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) came into existence in 1982 to "support the professionalism of family child care and to encourage high quality care for children" (NAFCC, 1999). Family child care, or family day care, is care that is provided by an individual in his or her home to a small group of children. There are approximately 1,000,000 family day care providers in the United States caring for approximately 4,000,000 children (NAFCC, 1999). Currently there are approximately 1,200 NAFCC accredited family child care providers, with about 700 more in the self-study process (D. Eaton).

Family child care providers must register their business and follow local licensing requirements in areas such as group size, caregiver to child ratios, food preparation, and space provisions. In 1994, NAFCC undertook the task of creating an accreditation process for family day care providers/programs. NAFCC teamed up with the well-regarded Family Child Care Project at Wheelock College, spending about three years to develop an accreditation process "from scratch". The goal of the project was to "recognize the special nature of high quality in this special form of child care" (NAFCC, 1999). A steering committee of top researchers in the early childhood field, along with 53 community work groups, developed the standards required for NAFCC accreditation. The community work groups represented a diverse sample of family child care providers, parents of children in family child care, and other early childhood professionals. The standards went through multiple iterations, until they were approved as sufficiently reflecting both best practice and the voices of the practitioners (D. Eaton).

In some literature on quality assurance in family day care, the NAFCC accreditation is compared with the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. Both are accepted quality indicators. NAFCC accredits a child care program, while the CDA certifies training and ability of an individual caregiver.

NAFCC Accreditation--Fees and Schedule

NAFCC's accreditation process takes place over three steps: self-study, an observer visit, and the Commission decision. The total fee for NAFCC accreditation is $495 for members, and $695 for non-members. The membership fee is $25, and a membership application can be submitted with the accreditation application. The accreditation fee is divided in half and collected twice during the accreditation process. The first half of the accreditation fee is due with the application form at the beginning of the process. The second half of the fee is due with the request for an Observer Visit (following the self-study) (C. Neib).

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NAFCC Accreditation--Step 1, Self-Study

In the self-study, the provider rates his or her compliance on each standard on the checklist as one of the following: fully and consistently met, partially or sometimes met, or not met. The NAFCC standards were developed based on the concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, and cover six major content areas:

1. Relationships
2. Environment
3. Activities
4. Developmental learning goals
5. Safety and health
6. Professional and business practices.

Some standards within the content areas are designated as mandatory for accreditation. Of the remainder of the standards, 90 percent must be met to qualify for accreditation.

NAFCC Standard Example

An example of a mandatory standard under the Relationships content area is: "The provider observes children's behavior, verbal and body language, and abilities. The provider uses this information to respond to each child. For example, the provider responds to a baby's crying as promptly and effectively as possible" (NAFCC, 1998, p. 8). In addition to the self-observation checklist, the provider must distribute and collect parent surveys, as well as assemble the appropriate documentation required for review by the observer.

The product of the self-study for the provider is a professional development plan, designed by the provider over the course of the self-study. This plan consists of changes required to meet standards to achieve accreditation. Before contacting NAFCC to schedule the observer visit, the provider makes necessary program adjustments to improve quality and meet the required standards. It is recommended that the provider join a training class or a self-study group, or get help from a mentor or advisor (NAFCC, 1998).

NAFCC Accreditation--Step 2, The Observer Visit

In the next step of the process, an Observer makes a four to five hour visit to confirm the results of the self-study. Observers are early childhood professionals who have participated in a

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16-hour training course. They are paid a stipend for their time and travel expenses (A. Mead). As part of this visit, the Observer interviews the provider to review what they have seen.

NAFCC Accreditation--Step 3, The Commission Decision

With documentation from the self-study and the observer visit, a four-person commission makes a decision on whether or not to accredit the family child care center. Commissioners have three choices to make in the decision process: to accredit, to provisionally accredit, or to defer. Centers that are provisionally accredited are provided with a detailed explanation of the few issues that need attention before full accreditation can be granted. Centers that are deferred are out of compliance with too many standards to be provisionally accredited. They are encouraged to take another look at their center, and to make the necessary changes before attempting accreditation again (A. Mead).

NAFCC accreditation is granted for three years. To be reaccredited, a family care center must undertake the same process as was taken to be initially accredited.

NAFCC Accreditation--Impact Research

Although NAFCC accreditation is mentioned in research on improving quality in family day care homes, it has not been the direct subject of a quality impact assessment. Quality improvement in family child care has been the focus of research at Families and Work Institute. NAFCC accreditation was noted by Families and Work Institute in one article as an initiative to improve quality in family child care (Dombro, 1994). In a second Families and Work Institute article, working towards NAFCC accreditation was cited as a professional development strategy for family day care providers seeking to improve the quality of care that they provide (Dombro, 1995).

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D. Council of Accreditation for Services to Families and Children (COA)

The Council of Accreditation Services to Families and Children (COA) was established in 1977 as an international standard-setting and accreditation organization in a joint effort between Family Service America and the Child Welfare League of America (COA, 1999). COA's mission is:

> to strengthen and actively promote the quality of social and mental health services that support and improve the lives of families and children and the well-being of society through: developing standards of best practice; developing a program of provider accreditation; advocating for national and international policies that promote high-quality services; building multicultural and multiracial insights and capacities with respect for diversity; promoting a service focus that builds on individual and family strengths; and providing educational and technical assistance programs (COA, 1999).

The purpose of COA's accreditation process is to provide a "system of measuring an organization's compliance with national standards, which have achieved professional and consumer standards" (COA, 1999).

COA's accreditation process is not geared solely for child care organizations, as are the others in this report. Rather, as its name and mission indicates, it supports accreditation processes for approximately 57 different types of human services. As of April 1998, approximately 900 human service organizations had achieved COA accreditation, 125 of which are child care agencies (N. Hazard). COA has advisory standards panels for each specific human service type; these boards review standards and make recommendations for improvements.

COA's accreditation occurs via four main steps: application submission with appropriate fees and agreements, self-study, peer reviewer site visit, and decision by regional COA Commission. The average time necessary to complete the accreditation process is one year (COA, 1997). Organizations seeking accreditation must be in operation for at least one year and must possess all applicable licenses prior to application.

COA designates an accreditation associate to provide support and interpretation of standards. Associates assist approximately 150 agencies a piece (COA, 1999a). In addition to the assignment of an accreditation associate, and before beginning the accreditation process, a

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member of the participating organization can attend a training session to learn about COA standards. COA offers three sessions on a fairly continuous basis, with the location shifting from city to city around the United States. These workshops are entitled: Intensive Accreditation Training (IAT), Continuous Quality Improvement Standards Workshop (CQI), and The Path to COA Accreditation.

COA Accreditation--Fees and Schedule

The application fee for any organization is $600, with additional fees for site visit expenses, accreditation, and maintenance of accreditation. When a program applies for accreditation, the application fee is submitted along with required documentation of that organization, such as a copy of the mission statement and the most recent annual report. A financial agreement and accreditation timetable are returned to the program. The financial agreement includes anticipated site visit expenses and the accreditation fee. The accreditation fee for programs is based on a sliding scale, applied according to the organization's revenue in the year preceding application. Fifty percent of the accreditation fee is due at the time the financial agreement is executed. Upon COA's receipt of this deposit, the program is sent an accreditation agreement, a copy of the generic standards and a set of policies and procedures. The remaining 50% of the fees designated in the financial agreement is due within 90 days. (COA, 1998).

COA Accreditation Process--Self-Study

In the self-study portion of the accreditation process, COA requires organizations to gather information and complete a thorough report regarding compliance with both Generic and Service Specific standards. The main headings for the eleven generic standards are:

1. Organizational purpose and relationship with the community
2. Continuous quality improvement processes
3. Organizational stability
4. Management of human resources
5. Quality of the service environment
6. Financial and risk management
7. Professional practices
8. Assessment and planning for behavioral health care services (BHC)
9. Service delivery processes for BHC
10. Assessment and planning for community support and education services (CSE)
11. Service delivery processes for CSE (COA, 1998).

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Though standards 8 to 11 appear redundant, the required generic standards to be followed for a specific organization depend upon the type of service the organization provides (behavioral health care or community support and education). In the case where an organization provides both service types, both sets of standards are required (COA, 1997).

Child care specific standards, which fall under the CSE category, are entitled S37: Group Day Care for Children, Family Child Day Care for Children, Child Day Care Center Service/Early Childhood Education Service. The main standard headings under S37 are:

1. Access to service
2. Social services
3. Parental involvement
4. Health and safety
5. Family day care and group homes
6. Developmental and educational service in day care centers
7. Adult-child rations in day care centers
8. Human resources
9. Outcomes (COA, 1997)

COA uses a self-termed Weighting System to assess whether or not standards are adequately met for accreditation. During the self-study, the organization rates itself on all of the standards. Standards are categorized as first order, second order and third order. The Weighting System classifies compliance with COA's first and second order standards into two categories: mandatory or critical. The orders of standards represent increasing levels of specificity (COA, 1997). "The first order standards state the requirements of the entire section (the sections are the generic headings listed above), the second order standards detail in increasing specificity how that requirement is to be met, and the third order standards spell out what an organization must do to comply with the second-order standards" (COA, 1997, p. xiv).

Standards are rated on a four-point scale: full compliance, substantial compliance, partial compliance, and non-compliance (from one point to four points respectively) (COA, 1997). All first order standards are mandatory, as are many second order standards. The remainder of the second order standards are critical. In order to achieve accreditation, all mandatory standards must be met with full or substantial compliance, all but two critical standards must be met with full or substantial compliance, and 85 percent of third order standards must be met with full or substantial compliance (COA, 1997). The following diagram is provided to clarify the breakdown of standard types and levels of compliance required to achieve accreditation.

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Table 3--COA's Levels of Standards and Compliance

	1st Order	2nd Order		3rd Order
	Mandatory	Mandatory	Critical	(not classified)
Full compliance	All of these standards must be met within these levels of compliance		All but 2 must be met within these levels	85% of these standards must be met within these levels
Substantial compliance				
Partial compliance				

COA Child Care Service Standard Examples

First Order Standard Example

The only first order, **mandatory** standard in the child care service section is: "The organization which provides full or partial day care service, Head Start programs, early childhood education service, and/or family and group day care service complies with applicable standards of this section" (COA, 1997, p. S37-3).

Second Order Standard Example

Within the child care service section, there are a total of nine secondary standards (these are listed above as the S37 standard headings). Seven of these nine secondary standards are **mandatory**. One of the seven mandatory second order standards for child care is: "The day care center provides appropriate adult supervision" (COA, 1997, p. S37-32).

Third Order Standard Example

The third order standards are the most measurable, specific standards. An example of a third order standard under the mandatory secondary standard listed above, is: "The day care center has a plan for maintaining appropriate ratios when a child is ill, must be isolated from the group, and needs supervision or care" (COA, 1997, p. S37-33). To rate this standard, it must first be determined whether or not the standard is met. If the standard is met, it must then be determined at what level of compliance the center meets the standard on the previously mentioned four-point rating scale. For this particular standard, the following Rating Indicators are given:

1. The adult-child ratio is maintained at all times.
2. The adult-child ratio may vary slightly, such as one or two additional children per adult.

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3. The adult-child ratio is frequently out of compliance, as in three to five additional
4. The center is seriously out of compliance. (COA, 1997, p. S37-33)

When a center has finished compiling all information for the self-study, it turns in its report, which is reviewed and validated by a Peer Reviewer team.

COA Accreditation Process--Peer Review Site Visit

The Peer Review team consists of a minimum of two reviewers who spend at least two full days onsite evaluating the program's level of compliance with COA standards. "Compliance is measured standard by standard" (COA, 1998) by this COA-trained team. When the program's application is being processed, COA determines how many peer reviewers will make a site visit, and estimates the necessary length of the visit. The peer reviewer team is assigned by COA to visit a particular program according to the mix of services offered by the program and a match with the expertise of the reviewers. Reviewer qualifications include field experience in a senior staff position, preferably at a COA-accredited program. One team member acts as the team leader. That individual must be an experienced COA peer reviewer and must be associated with a COA-accredited program.

At the completion of the review, team members meet with program administrators to discuss the results of the visit, highlighting strengths and areas where reviewers were unable to verify compliance. The team completes a preliminary accreditation report on the organization's compliance with COA standards. This report is returned to COA; it is also sent to the program in question for a response.

COA Accreditation Process--Commission Decision

Accreditation Commissions are composed of members elected by COA's Board of Trustees. Each Commission is chaired by a board trustee, and composed of experienced peer reviewers or executives from accredited programs. Additionally, one member of each Commission is filled by an individual who represents public interest; this individual has appropriate professional experience to render judgment, but is not affiliated with a COA-accredited organization (COA, 1998).

The Accreditation Commission has four decision options. Decisions can be to accredit for full cycle, to seek more information, to require remediation, or to deny or withdraw the application. The decision to accredit is only made upon a unanimous Commission decision. If a

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program feels that is has been unfairly considered, appeals to the commission decision can be filed.

COA Accreditation--Terms and Reaccreditation

Accreditation is currently in effect for a four year cycle; however a transition is being made to use of a three year cycle. Organizations are required to confirm maintenance of accreditation on an annual basis via a Maintenance of Accreditation Report. In addition to this report, programs are required to self-report any notable changes made or events that have occurred on the premises.

Eighteen months prior to the accreditation expiration date, COA contacts a program to alert them of the need to reaccredit. The reaccreditation process is generally the same as the initial process--self-evaluation, and peer reviewer site visit. However, COA uses an alternating cycle of a focused process and a full-scale process. The full scale process is the same as the initial process. The focused process only requires review of the weighted standards (those that are mandatory and critical) (COA, 1998).

COA Accreditation--Impact Research

To date, there is no known research on the impact and effectiveness of COA's accreditation process in improving quality in COA-accredited human service organizations (N. Hazard).

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V. Accreditation Standards Comparison

This section provides a comparison of the four accreditation processes previously described. These charts were designed to be used within this document and as a stand-alone primer on early childhood program accreditation processes.

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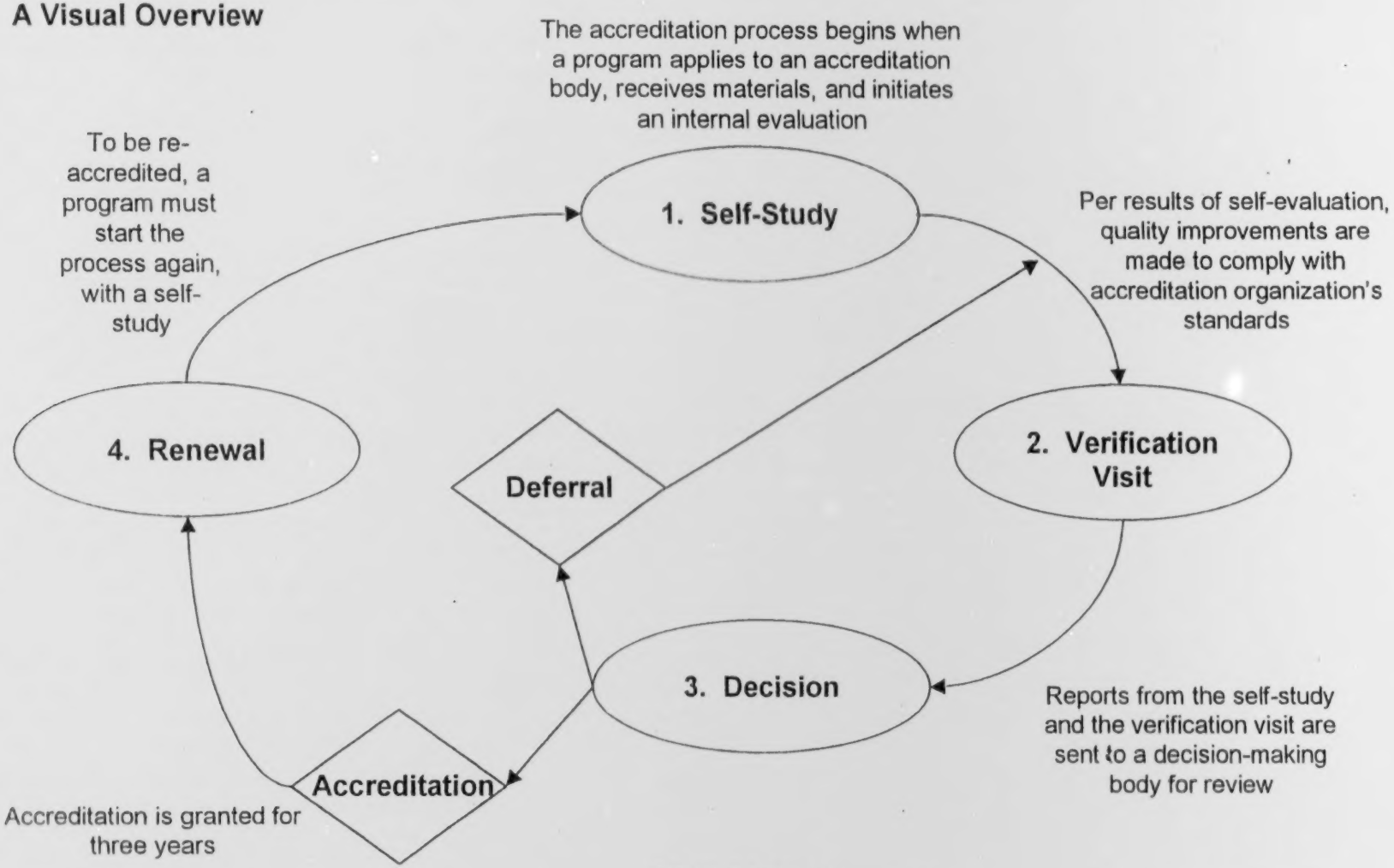
Accreditation Processes

A Visual Overview


The accreditation process begins when a program applies to an accreditation body, receives materials, and initiates an internal evaluation
1. Self-Study
Per results of self-evaluation, quality improvements are made to comply with accreditation organization's standards
2. Verification Visit
Reports from the self-study and the verification visit are sent to a decision-making body for review
3. Decision
Deferral
Accreditation
Accreditation is granted for three years
4. Renewal
To be re-accredited, a program must start the process again, with a self-study

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Accreditation Processes

Processes Reviewed

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
- Council of Accreditation for Family and Youth Services (COA)

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Accreditation Processes

NAEYC Overview

The National Association for the Education of Young Children accredits early childhood programs through the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. All types of early childhood programs are eligible for this accreditation. NAEYC accreditation is the oldest among early childhood accreditation processes.

NAEYC Standard Headings

- ✓ Interactions Among Teachers and Children
- ✓ Curriculum
- ✓ Relationships Among Teachers and Families
- ✓ Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- ✓ Administration
- ✓ Staffing
- ✓ Physical Environment
- ✓ Health and Safety
- ✓ Nutrition and Food Service
- ✓ Evaluation

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Accreditation Processes

NAFCC Overview

The National Association for Family Child Care specifically serves family day care providers. Given their target audience, their standards are focused on quality issues that affect day care programs provided in a family home to a small group of children.

NAFCC Standard Headings

- ✓ Relationships
- ✓ Environment
- ✓ Activities
- ✓ Developmental Learning Goals
- ✓ Safety and Health
- ✓ Professional Business Practices

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Accreditation Processes

NECPA Overview

The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation system was created using a key indicator approach. Research has identified key indicators of quality in early childhood environments. The presence of these quality indicators in an evaluation of an early childhood program indicates that other quality characteristics are statistically likely to be present in that program. As such, this accreditation system tests for a smaller number of quality aspects than does NAEYC or COA.

This system's quality standards are based on those of NAEYC.

NECPA Standard Headings

- ✓ Administration and General Operations
- ✓ Professional Development and Work Environment
- ✓ Outdoor Environment
- ✓ Indoor Environment
- ✓ Developmental Program
- ✓ Parent and Community Involvement
- ✓ Formal School Linkage
- ✓ Health and Safety

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Accreditation Processes

COA Overview

The Council of Accreditation for Services to Families and Children accredits about 50 different types of human service organizations. COA has two types of standards: generic and service-specific. Any organization seeking COA accreditation must comply with the generic standards. They must also comply with their respective service-specific standards.

Generic Standard Headings

- ✓ Organizational Purpose and Relationship With the Community
- ✓ Continuous Quality Improvement Processes
- ✓ Organizational Stability
- ✓ Management of Human Resources
- ✓ Quality of Service Environment
- ✓ Financial and Risk Management
- ✓ Professional Practices
- ✓ Assessment and Planning for Community Support and Educational Services
- ✓ Service Delivery Processes for Community Support and Educational Services

Child Care Service-Specific Standard Headings

- ✓ Access to Service
- ✓ Social Services
- ✓ Parental Involvement
- ✓ Health and Safety
- ✓ Developmental and Educational Service in Day Care Centers
- ✓ Adult-Child Ratios in Day Care Centers
- ✓ Human Resources
- ✓ Outcomes

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Accreditation Processes

Process Comparison Introduction

Each major NAEYC standard heading is listed on the following charts, with the NAEYC goal for that major quality area.

* NAEYC standards are used as the benchmark for this comparison for two reasons: 1) they are the most widely recognized accreditation standards in early childhood environments, 2) they have been independently assessed and are known to contribute to quality improvement in child care.
* The comparison uses the NAEYC standard and examines whether or not a comparable standard(s) exists within the other processes' standards.

Summaries of NAEYC standards are listed in the charts.

NAFCC, NECPA, and COA standards are compared to those of NAEYC using the following ratings:

➢ *Exceeds*	Standard exceeds requirements of NAEYC standard
➢ *Meets*	Standard meets requirements of NAEYC standard
➢ *Below*	Standard below requirements of NAEYC standard
➢ *Not Addressed*	Though a NAEYC standard, this is not addressed by the current process
➢ *Not Applicable*	Though a NAEYC standard, this is not applicable for the current process

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Accreditation Processes

Time/Fee Comparison

	NAEYC	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Estimated/Average Time*	Time to complete varies	2 Months to 2 Years	1 Year	1 Year
*As predicted by the accreditation organization				
Costs				
Application	$125 - $300	$247 - $347	$300 - $400	$600
Initiating Process	N/A	N/A	N/A	$1475 - $3700*
Midway	$300 - $700	$248 - $348	$350 - $550	$1475 - $3700*
Verification Visit Expenses	N/A	N/A	up to $250	average range $2000-$2500
TOTAL Cost Range	$425 - $1000	$495 - $695	$650 - $1200	$5550 - $10500*

*This range represents a sliding scale for programs with annual operating budgets between $200,000 and $2,000,000

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Accreditation Processes

Auspices / Pre-requisites / History of Processes

	NAEYC	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Programs Accredited				
Non-profit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
For-profits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Center-based	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Family Day Care	Yes	YES*	Yes	Yes
Religious-based	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Program Pre-requisites				
Time in operation	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year
Applicable Licenses & Registration	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Accreditation Process History				
Year Established	1985	1994	1992	1977
Total programs currently accredited	6,000	1,200	80	125
Total programs currently in process	12,000	700	300	unknown

*NAFCC accreditation is solely for family-day care providers

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Accreditation Processes

Steps and Terminology

		NAEYC	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Application Required		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-Assessment		Self-Study	Self-Study	Self-Evaluation	Self-Study
	Questionnaires	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Checklists	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Weighted Standards	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Parental Input	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Staff Input	Yes	Not Applicable	Yes	Yes
	Community Input	No	No	No	No
Verification		Validation	Observer Visit	Verification	Peer Reviewer Site Visit
	Who Visits?	Volunteer validators	Volunteer observer	Volunteer verifier	Volunteer Peer Reviewer
	Paid?	No	No	$50 stipend for expenses	variable for expenses
	Pre-visit training	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Number of visitors/Duration of Visit	>60 children, 1 validator/ 1 day	1 person for 1 day	1person/1 day for up to 120 Children	At least 2 peer reviewers on site for at least 2 days
		61-120 children, 1 validator/ 2 days or 2 validators/ 1 day		2+ visitors/1-3 days for 121+Children	
		121-240 children, 2 validators/2 days or 3 validators/1 day			
		240+ children, 3 validators/ 2 days			
Decision		Commission Decision	Commission Decision	Council and Commission Decision	Commission Decision
	Length of Accreditation	3 years	3 years	3 years	3 years
	Decision options	Accreditation	Accreditation	Full Accreditation	Full Accreditation
		Deferral	Deferral	Pending Accreditation	Deferral of Accreditation
			Denial	Deferral	Denial
				Denial	

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Accreditation Processes

Compliance Measurement Comparison

	NAEYC	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Compliance Measured in Levels?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Levels				
	1. Not Met	Fully and Consistently Met		1. Full Compliance
	2. Partially Met	Partially or Sometimes Met		2. Substantial Compliance
	3. Fully Met	Not Met		3. Partial Compliance
		Not Applicable		4. Non-compliance
				Not Applicable
	* Higher score desirable			* Lower score desirable

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal
Interactions among teachers and children

Interactions between children and adults provide opportunities for children to develop and understanding of self and others and are characterized by warmth, personal respect, individuality, positive support, and responsiveness. Teachers facilitate interactions among children to provide opportunities for development of self-esteem, social competence, and intellectual growth.

NAEYC Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Teacher interactions with children frequent, respectful and affectionate	Meets	Meets	Below
Teachers available and responsive to all children's needs at all times	Meets	Meets	Below
Conversations with children frequent, child-directed, and with positive regard for children's families/cultures/backgrounds; open-ended questions posed to children	Below	Below	Not Addressed
Personal identity and cultural differences respected; activities promote positive identity development	Meets	Below	Below
Teachers assist children towards independent functioning	Meets	Below	Below
Teachers facilitate children's development of responsibility, self-regulation and self-control	Meets	Below	Below
No corporal punishment, humiliation or physical threats; food and beverage never withheld as punishment	Meets	Meets	Exceeds
Environmental sounds pleasant, not harsh or forced quiet	Below	Not Addressed	Not Addressed
Teachers support children's emotional development	Meets	Meets	Below
Teachers recognize and encourage children's prosocial behaviors	Meets	Not Addressed	Below
Teachers utilize a variety of teaching strategies to enhance learning and development	Meets	Below	Below

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal

Curriculum

The curriculum engages children actively in the learning process, provides a variety of developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and encourages children to pursue their own interests in the context of life in the community and the world.

Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Program has a written statement of philosophy and goals for children, available to all staff and families	Below	Meets	Exceeds
Program has written curriculum plans, and learning activities reflect the program's philosophy and goals	Below	Meets	Below
Teachers define goals for individual children, used to guide planning; teachers individually assess children, and identify and adapt to special needs	Below	Below	Meets
Program designed to be inclusive of all children, including children with identified disabilities; Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) and Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP's) are developed	Meets	Below	Below
Daily schedule provides a balance of activities including: outdoor play, periods of activity and quiet, large and small muscle activities, options away from the group, child-directed activities, and teacher-directed activities	Meets	Meets	Meets
Developmentally appropriate materials and equipment available to all age groups; materials and equipment represent diverse racial, gender and age attributes	Meets	Meets	Below
Active media (like cameras and audio tapes) and developmentally appropriate computer software is accessible and controllable by children	Meets	Not Addressed	Not Addressed
Passive media (like television and films) is limited to developmentally appropriate programming, previewed by adults	Below	Below	Not Addressed
Teachers provide a variety of developmentally appropriate activities, experiences, and materials to engage children in active, meaningful learning	Meets	Meets	Below
Teacher provide materials and time for children to initiate own activities	Meets	Meets	Below
Teachers conduct smooth transitions between activities	Meets	Meets	Not Addressed
Teachers flexible to change planned activities according to the needs and interests of the children	Meets	Meets	Below
Routine tasks incorporated into the program as a means of furthering children's learning, self-help, and social skills	Below	Meets	Below

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal
Relationships Among Teachers and Families

Teachers and families work closely in partnership to ensure high-quality care and education for children, and parents feel supported and welcomed as observers and contributors to the program.

NAEYC Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Program information is given to new and perspective parents; parents have input into program policies and procedures; non-English materials available	Below	Meets	Exceeds
Orientation process for new children and families	Below	Not Addressed	Meets
Teachers work in partnership with families, with attention to ongoing, two-way communication	Meets	Below	Meets
Parents are welcome visitors at all times and are encouraged to be involved in the program in a variety of ways	Meets	Meets	Meets
A system is established to communicate day-to-day happenings in the program that affect the chidlren	Below	Below	Meets
Teachers and parents work together to make decisions about how best to support children's development and learning, or to address problems as they arise	Meets	Not Addressed	Meets
Families are informed about the program and curriculum, including any changes that occur	Below	Meets	Meets
Teachers and families communicate to ensure that children experience a smooth transition from one program to another during the day	Not Addressed	Not Addressed	Below
Communication between staff and families conveys trust and respect	Below	Below	Not Addressed
Administrators and families are familiar with community resources and social services, making use of them as necessary	Meets	Meets	Meets
Policies ensure that staff and families have an effective way of negotiating difficulties and differences that arise in their interactions	Below	Not Addressed	Exceeds

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard and Goal

Staff Qualifications and Professional Development

The program is staffed by adults who understand child and family development and who recognize and meet the developmental and learning needs of children and families.

Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Teaching staff qualifications appropriate for level of responsibility	Meets	Meets	Excceds
Staff working directly with children must be at lease 18 and demonstrate personal characteristics for working with children	Meets	Meets	Below
Teacher assistants are high school graduates with training in early childhood education (ECE) or child development (CD) and participate in ongoing professional development	Not Applicable	Meets	Not Addressed
Teachers have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or an associate's degree in ECE or CD	Below	Meets	Meets
Staff working with school-aged children have professional preparation in CD, ECE, elementary education (El Ed), recreation, or a related field	Below	Below	Not Addressed
Volunteers receive orientation and ongoing professional development, and only work with children under the supervision of qualified staff	Not Applicable	Meets	Meets
Administrator has expertise in both ECE or CD and administration (human resources and financial management)	Below	Meets	Below
An Early Childhood Specialist (with a bachelor's degree in ECE and 3 yrs. full-time experience with young children,OR a graduate degree in ECE or CD) directs the educational program	Not Applicable	Meets	Meets
For school-age programs, a specialist has revelant professional preparation and 3 yrs. experience working with school-agers	Below	Below	Not Addressed
A staff orientation is provided	Not Applicable	Meets	Exceeds
Opportunities for continued professional development exist	Not Applicable	Exceeds	Exceeds

Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

Staff Qualifications--Requirements by Process

NAEYC				
	Director	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Teacher's Assistant
Relevant Master's				
Relevant Bachelor's				
Relevant Associate's				
CDA Credential				
Some Training				
Teaching Experience	3 years			

COA		
	Director	Teacher
Relevant Master's		
Relevant Bachelor's		
Relevant Associate's		
CDA/CCP Credential		
GED/HS Diploma		
Some Training		
Teaching Experience		

NECPA				
	Director	ECE Specialist	Lead Teacher	Assistant Teacher
Relevant Master's				
Relevant Bachelor's				
Relevant Associate's				
CDA/CCP Credential				
GED/HS Diploma				
Some Training				
Teaching Experience	2 Years	3 Years	1-3 Years	

NAFCC
The provider holds a high school diploma or GED, seeks continuing training and education, and is open to new ideas about family child care. At least 65 hours of FCC related training within the last three years is documented.

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal
Administration

The program is efficiently and effectively administered with attention to the needs and desires of children, families and staff.

NAEYC Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Annual goal-setting and evaluation of program occurs	Not Addressed	Below	Exceeds
Operating policies are written and include policies on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) enrollment, child abuse and neglect reporting requirements and procedures	Below	Meets	Meets
Personnel policies and practices: program has written documentation for job descriptions, salary scales, benefits, performance expectations, termination and resignation, and grievance procedures	Not Applicable	Below	Exceeds
Employees have a comprehensive benefits package	Not Applicable	Not Addressed	Below
Records are kept on the program and related operations	Meets	Meets	Exceeds
Program has a board of directors and written governance policies	Not Applicable	Not Addressed	Exceeds
Fiscal records are kept	Below	Not Addressed	Exceeds
Accident protection and liability insurance coverage is maintained for chidren and adults	Meets	Meets	Below
Staff interactions reflect mutual trust, respect and support	Not Applicable	Not Addressed	Not Addressed
Staff and administration plan and consult frequently about the pogram	Not Applicable	Meets	Meets
Staff members are provided space and time away from children during the day	Not Applicable	Below	Not Addressed
Staff keep family information confidential	Meets	Meets	Exceeds
In the director's absence, an appropriate person is designated to assume authority	Meets	Not Addressed	Below

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal

Staffing

The program is sufficiently staffed to meet the needs of and promote the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children.

Standards		NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Recommended staff-child ratios and group sizes are maintained		NOT ADDRESSED	Meets	Meets
Infants--birth to 12 months		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max: 6; Staff-child ratio 1:3		Meets*	Meets*
	Group Max: 8; Staff-child ratio 1:4		Meets*	Exceeds
Toddlers--12 to 24 months		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max: 6; Staff-child ratio 1:3		Meets*	Below
	Group Max: 8; Staff-child ratio 1:4		Meets*	Below
	Group Max:10; Staff-child ratio 1:5		Meets*	Below
	Group Max:12; Staff-child ratio 1:4		Exceeds	Meets*
2-year olds--24-30 months		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max: 8; Staff-child ratio 1:4		Meets*	Below
	Group Max:10; Staff-child ratio 1:5		Exceeds	Below
	Group Max:12; Staff-child ratio 1:6		Exceeds	Exceeds*
2.5 year-olds--30-36 months		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max:10; Staff-child ratio 1:5		Exceeds	Below
	Group Max:12; Staff-child ratio 1:6		Exceeds	Exceeds*
	Group Max:14; Staff-child ratio 1:7		Exceeds	Exceeds
3 year-olds		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max:14; Staff-child ratio 1:7		Meets*	Below
	Group Max:16; Staff-child ratio 1:8		Meets*	Meets*
	Group Max:18; Staff-child ratio 1:9		Meets*	Exceeds
	Group Max:20; Staff-child ratio 1:10		Meets*	Exceeds

"*" indicates recommended group maximum and/or teacher:child ratio for given process

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- *It is important to note that NAFCC does not address ratios or issues with multiple staff members because family day care centers are usually staffed by only one person, and licensing statutes limit the total number of children that can be cared for by an individual in their own home.*

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal

Staffing (Continued)

The program is sufficiently staffed to meet the needs of and promote the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children.

Standards		NAFCC	NECPA	COA
4 year-olds & 5 year-olds		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max:16; Staff-child ratio 1:8		Meets*	Meets*
	Group Max:18; Staff-child ratio 1:9		Meets*	Exceeds
	Group Max:20; Staff-child ratio 1:10		Meets*	Exceeds
Kindergartners		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max:20; Staff-child ratio 1:10		Not Addressed	Meets*
	Group Max:22; Staff-child ratio 1:11		Not Addressed	Exceeds
	Group Max:24; Staff-child ratio 1:12		Not Addressed	Exceeds
6-8 year-olds		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max:20; Staff-child ratio 1:10		Not Addressed	Below
	Group Max:22; Staff-child ratio 1:11		Not Addressed	Below
	Group Max:24; Staff-child ratio 1:12		Not Addressed	Meets*
	Group Max:30; Staff-child ratio 1:15		Not Addressed	Exceeds
9-12 year-olds		NOT ADDRESSED		
	Group Max:24; Staff-child ratio 1:12		Not Addressed	Meets*
	Group Max:30; Staff-child ratio 1:15		Not Addressed	Exceeds
Sufficient staff with primary responsibility for children are available to provide frequent personal contact, meaningful learning activities, and supervision		Not Applicable	Below	Below
Each staff member has primary responsibility for and develops a deeper attachment to an identified group of children		Not Applicable	Meets	Meets
Minimal transitions and regroupings occur for children during the day		Not Applicable	Not Addressed	Not Addressed

"*" indicates recommended group maximum and/or teacher:child ratio for given process

➢ *It is important to note that NAFCC does not address ratios or issues with multiple staff members because family day care centers are usually staffed by only one person, and licensing statutes limit the total number of children that can be cared for by an individual in their own home.*

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal
Physical Environment

The indoor and outdoor physical environment fosters optimal growth and development through opportunities for exploration and learning.

NAEYC Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
The indoor and outdoor environments are safe, clean, attractive, and spacious. A minimum or 35 square feet per child indoors, and a minimum of 75 square feet per child outdoors is required.	Below	Below	Below
Activity areas are defined clearly by spatial arrangement	Meets	Meets	Below
Space arranged to accomodate "learning centers", carpeting for crawling, and support for balance for new walkers	Meets	Meets	Below
Age-appropriate materials and equipment of sufficient quantity, variety and durability are readily accessible to children	Meets	Meets	Below
Individual spaces for children to store personal belongings are provided	Meets	Exceeds	Meets
Private areas are available indoors and outdoors for children to have solitude	Meets	Meets	Below
The environment includes soft and cozy elements such as rugs, cushions, and rocking chairs	Below	Meets	Below
Sound-absorbing materials are used to cut down on excessive noise	Not Addressed	Not Addressed	Not Addressed
Outdoor areas include a variety of surfaces and equipment, and protection by fences and natural barriers from streets and dangers	Below	Not Addressed	Below
The work environment for staff, including classrooms and staff rooms, is comforatble, well-organized, and in good repair	Not Applicable	Below	Exceeds

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal
Health and Safety

The health and safety of the children and adults are protected and enhanced.

NAEYC Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
All licenses are in order and program is in compliance with building codes, sanitation, water quality, and fire protection requirements.	Below	Below	Exceeds
Each adult is free of physical and psychological conditions that might adversely affect children's health	Below	Meets	Meets
A written record is maintained for each child, with health evaluation, proof of immunizations, and emergency contact and authorized pick-up information	Meets	Meets	Meets
Written policy for handling of sick children	Meets	Below	Meets
Provisions are made for safe arrival and departure of children, allowing for interactions between staff and families	Below	Below	Below
Transportation vehicles are equipped with age-appropriate restraint devices	Below	Meets	Exceeds
Children are under adult supervision at all times	Below	Meets	Below
Staff are alert to the health of each child	Below	Below	Below
Suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect are reported to appropriate local authorities	Meets	Exceeds	Exceeds
At least one staff member with emergency training is always present (CPR, first aid, and choking)	Meets	Exceeds	Meets
A plan exists for dealing with medical emergencies	Meets	Exceeds	Exceeds
Children are dressed appropriately for outdoor activities	Not Addressed	Not Addressed	Not Addressed
The facility is cleaned daily to disinfect bathroom fixtures and remove trash. Toys are cleaned, diaper tables are disinfected, soiled laundry is contained	Below	Below	Below
Hand washing & universal precautions	Meets	Meets	Meets
The building and all equipment are maintained in a safe, clean condition and in good repair	Meets	Exceeds	Exceeds
Bedding is washed at least once a week and used only by one child	Meets	Meets	Below
Toilets, drinking water and handwashing facilities are easily accessible to children	Below	Not Addressed	Below
All rooms are well-lit and ventilated	Meets	Below	Meets
All pieces of playground equipment are surrounded by a resilient surface of an acceptable depth, all play equipment is constructed and installed in a manner to be safe for use by children	Below	Meets	Below
All chemicals are stored in original, labeled containers and are locked in cabinets inaccessible to children. Medication is administered only when authorized by a parent and done so by a designated staff member	Meets	Exceeds	Meets
Evacuation procedures are known by staff and volunteers and practiced monthly--procedures are posted in conspicuous places	Below	Below	Meets
Staff and volunteers are familiar with emergency procedures, smoke detectors are checked periodically and emergency telephone numbers are posted by phones	Below	Meets	Meets

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal
Nutrition and Food Service

The nutritional needs of children and adults are met in a manner that promotes physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

NAEYC Standards	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Meals and snacks are planned to meet the child's nutritional requirements recommended by the Child and Adult Care Food Program of the USADA in proportion to the amount of time the child is in the program each day	Meets	Below	Meets
Menu and feeding information is provided to the families each day	Below	Below	Not Addressed
Mealtimes promote good nutrition habits and encourage independent feeding and positive social experiences with supervision of at least one adult	Below	Meets	Below
If the program does not provide food, the program provides information for families about well-balances meals that may be brought from home	Below	Not Addressed	Not Addressed
Food is prepared in compliance with legal requirements for nutrition and food service	Below	Not Addressed	Below

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Accreditation Processes

Standards Comparison

NAEYC Standard Heading and Goal
Evaluation

Systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the program in meeting its goals for children, families, and staff is conducted to ensure that good quality care and education are provided and maintained, and that the program continually strives for improvement and innovation.

	NAFCC	NECPA	COA
Standards			
All staff are evaluated at least annually by the appropriate supervisor, including classroom evaluations; staff are made aware of criteria ahead of time	Not Applicable	Meets	Meets
At least annually, all persons involved with the program are included in evaluating the program's effectiveness in meeting the needs of the children and families	Below	Meets	Exceeds
Individual descriptions of children's development and learning are written and compiled as a basis for planning appropriate learning activities and meeting individual needs	Meets	Meets	Meets

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VI. Early Childhood Program Standards

Like the accreditation processes previously described, the standards described below represent nationally accepted best practices in early childhood environments. The major difference between the accreditation processes and the standards is that these standards "stand alone". They are not enforced or monitored by any outside agency (with the exception of the Head Start standards). Following one of these sets of standards does not provide an external, quality "seal of approval". It is up to the child care program to select a set of standards to follow (if they so choose) and to develop a method to self-monitor. Some of the standards below, alone or in combination, have been used to inform the standards used in the accreditation processes, and vice versa.

A. Child Welfare League of America

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) was established in 1920, and in its nearly 80-year existence has set standards to improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of day care and other child welfare/social services in the United States (CWLA, 1999). The *Standards of Excellence for Child Day Care Services* is one set of service-specific standards in a larger volume called *CWLA Standards for Organization and Administration for All Child Welfare Services*. COA standards for their accreditation process are based, in part, on CWLA standards.

CWLA child day care standards were developed and have been reviewed and revised based upon "current knowledge, the developmental needs of children, and tested ways of meeting those needs most effectively" (CWLA, 1992, p. v). Standards are prepared according to current research and assumptions. "A final formulation of standards follows an extended discussion by experts (and) a review by CWLA member agencies (and) representatives of related professions" (CWLA, 1992, p. vi).

CWLA child day care standards are intended to reference care services that occur outside the home of the child for any portion of the 24-hour day (CWLA, 1992). The assumption is that all child care programs are composed of the same essential components and should offer the same basic opportunities for children's developmental growth, regardless of specific population served. Specifically:

> Children have the same basic developmental needs; they should all have the opportunity to benefit from advances in knowledge and professional skills in the fields of child development, early childhood education, health care, nutrition, and social work. Regardless of the emphasis of a given child day care program, the reasons parents use

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> it, or the number of hours children attend it, the children should have developmentally appropriate experiences. Any child day care service designed to help parents carry out their child-rearing responsibilities should support and enhance their parental role. The child day care service should be appropriate to the individual needs of each child it serves (CWLA, 1992, p. 1)

CWLA's standards fall under six major headings:

1. Child day care program
2. Facilities
3. Staffing
4. Administration
5. Support services
6. Current and emerging growth issues.

CWLA Standard Example

Each major heading is accompanied by an overall, defining statement. For example, under the first heading, Child day care program, the following statement occurs: "the child day care program should include both a developmental learning program and a health, safety, and nutrition program" (CWLA, 1992, p. 23). There are 28 numbered standards under the Child day care program heading, many of which fall under the sub-headings: Common developmental learning principles and goals for all child day care programs; Developmental learning activities; The health, safety and nutrition program; Assessing health care needs; Safety; and Nutrition. The standards under these subheadings consist of another defining statement and increasingly specific requirements to meet the standard.

Continuing the example above, a specific standard under the Child day care program heading is: "1.2 Goals of the developmental learning program for the child--The developmental learning goals of each child in a child day care program should be realized through opportunities to form relationships with other children and adults, to use various materials and equipment, and to increase levels of self-confidence and mastery." (CWLA, 1992, p. 25) This defining statement is further elaborated: "Children in a child day care program should have available to them the following developmental learning experiences..." (CWLA, 1992, p. 25). Thirteen specific experiences are described, one of which is: "Opportunities to work at their own developmental level and pace, yet have appropriate challenges" (CWLA, 1992, p. 25).

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CWLA intends for a variety of people or groups to use these standards in a variety of ways. The standards are "directed to all who are concerned with the enhancement of services to children and their families" (CWLA, 1992, p. vi). These standards do not have an inherent scoring mechanism; they are not intended for use to "measure" quality. They reach a level of specificity that allows an observer (outside or within a program), to assess existing conditions based on observations in comparison with CWLA standards. By observing whether or not a CWLA standard is met, a program can identify areas for quality improvement.

B. American Public Health Association / American Academy of Pediatrics

In 1992, the American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics (APHA/AAP) published a standards manual for out-of-home child care. The *National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Caring for our Children: Guidelines for Out-Of-Home Child Care Programs* were developed to recommend "health standards...(to) be applied to child care programs on a national level" (APHA/AAP, 1992, p. xvii). Technical panels were assembled to examine ten specific areas of health and safety:

1. Environmental quality
2. Prevention and control of infectious diseases
3. Injury prevention and control
4. General health
5. Nutrition
6. Prevention and management of child abuse
7. Staff health
8. Children with special needs
9. Health concerns related to social environmental and child development
10. Health and safety organization and administration (APHA/AAP, 1992, p. xiii).

These panels spent two years researching and developing standards specific to their area of expertise. Finally, all of the information and recommendations were merged into a single set of standards. These standards were not developed to replace existing early childhood care standards (such as NAEYC's and CWLA's, which are specifically noted), but rather to "supplement them from the particular perspective of health and safety" (APHA/AAP, 1992, p. xx).

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The standards were created as a resource for a variety of audiences, including: caregivers, parents, funding agencies, public health professionals, Departments of Education, and licensing agencies. Standards are written to permit enforcement of licensing regulations. They were also intended to be concrete and specific, so as to be easily put into practice by caregivers. The APHA/AAP recognizes and defines seven different types of out-of-home child care situations: center, large family-child-care home, small family-child-care homes, special facilities for ill children, facilities for children with special needs, school-age-child care facilities, and drop-in facilities. A rationale has been included for each standard. Where appropriate, comments are included for standards. These comments are further elaborations of the standard, suggestions for implementation, and resources for more information.

APHA/AAP Standard Example

This sample illustrates a standard and an accompanying rationale. There are no associated comments with this standard. Under the heading Activities for Healthy Development, subheading, Program Activities for 3- to 5-Year-Olds: "PR14--opportunities shall be provided for children to observe, explore and reorder, make mistakes and find solutions, and move from the concrete to the abstract in learning" (APHA/AAP, 1992, p. 49)

The rationale for this standard: "The most meaningful learning is that which has its source in the child's own self-initiated activities. The learning environment that supports individual differences, learning styles, abilities, and cultural values will foster confidence and curiosity in the learner" (APHA/AAP, 1992, p. 49).

C. *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and Related Scales: (ITERS, FCERS & SACERS)*

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) was published in 1980 by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The purpose of developing the scale was to provide an instrument to early childhood professionals for research and program improvement purposes (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1997). The items appearing on the scale are a direct result of years of research and testing regarding quality in early childhood settings. The original scale and subsequent revisions were subject to numerous validity and field tests, and proves reliable as an entire scale and at the indicator and item levels (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1997).

In 1997, a revised edition was published to incorporate research developments in the areas of inclusion, cultural diversity, and developmentally appropriate practice. ECERS has been used (along with other quality measurement tools) in many major studies investigating and comparing quality across child care programs. Some examples for this use are the *Cost, Quality*

and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers (Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995) study and *NAEYC Accreditation as a Strategy for Improving Child Care Quality* (Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes, 1997).

To address the fact that there are different types of child care facilities, the ECERS researchers have developed separate scales for infant/toddler care (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale--ITERS), family day care (Family Day Care Rating Scale--FDCRS), and school-age care (School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale--SACERS). The items on these other scales are based upon the ECERS items; however they are tailored to address the specific differences that arise in serving various age groups in various settings. The ECERS, geared for rating programs serving two-and-a-half year olds to five year olds, has seven subscales:

1. Space and furnishings
2. Personal care routines
3. Language-reasoning
4. Activities
5. Interaction
6. Program structure
7. Parents and staff.

ECERS, and its related scales, are intended for use by an outside, objective observer of a program. ECERS researchers advise that observers should be trained in using the scale before they actually do so. This training is available via a video training package (ECERS, 1998).

For each item within the subscale, standards are rated from one, representing inadequate meeting of a requirement, to seven, representing excellent meeting of a requirement. Descriptors are provided for ratings one (inadequate), three (minimal), five (good), and seven (excellent). Scores are assigned starting with the indicators for a rating of one; if any of these indicators is applicable, that item is rated a one. If none of the indicators for a rating of one are applicable, and half of indicators for a rating of three are applicable, that item is rated a two. If all of the indicators for three are applicable, the item is rated a three. If all of the indicators for three are applicable and at least half of the indicators for a rating of five are applicable, the item is rated a four. The scoring proceeds in this pattern up to the rating of seven. Finally, a rating is determined for each subscale by calculating the average of the individual item ratings within the subscale (ECERS, 1998).

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ECERS Standard Example

Under the subscale Interaction, one item is Staff-child interactions. There are ten indicators for the item: three for a rating of one, two for a rating of three, three for a rating of five, and two for a rating of seven. They appear as follows:

"1.1 Staff members are not responsive to or not involved with children (ex. ignore children, staff seem distant or cold).

1.2 Interactions are unpleasant (ex. voices sound strained and irritable).

1.3 Physical contact used principally for control (ex. hurrying children along) or inappropriately (ex. unwanted hugs or tickling).

3.1 Staff usually respond to children in a warm, supportive manner (ex. staff and children seem relaxed, voices cheerful, frequent smiling).

3.2 Few, if any, unpleasant interactions.

5.1 Staff show warmth through appropriate physical contact (ex. pat a child on the back, return a child's hug)

5.2 Staff show respect for children (ex. listen attentively, make eye contact, treat children fairly, do not discriminate).

5.3 Staff respond sympathetically to help children who are upset, hurt, or angry.

7.1 Staff seem to enjoy being with children.

7.2 Staff encourage the development of mutual respect between children and adults (ex. staff wait until children finish asking questions before answering; encourage children in a polite way to listen while adults speak)." (ECERS, 1998, p. 40)

The authors of ECERS note that "for purposes of...program improvement, to gain additional information beyond the quality level score, (an) observer can...score all the indicators...the additional information may...be helpful in making plans for specific improvements" (ECERS, 1998, p. 6). In this case, each indicator should be scored as Yes, meaning it was observed, or No, meaning it was not observed. The score sheet allows for this option.

In the 1997 Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes study of the impact of NAEYC accreditation standards, researchers compared NAEYC's self-study standards with the ECERS sub-scale items

to determine which items corresponded. In all, they found that 73% of the items in NAEYC's accreditation standards are addressed by the ECERS. Although NAEYC's standards appear to be more thorough, the indicators required to achieve an excellent rating on the ECERS are higher than those to achieve the highest ratings by NAEYC (Whitebook, et al., 1997).

D. Head Start

Head Start Program Performance Standards are designed "to ensure that the Head Start goals and objectives are implemented successfully, that the Head Start philosophy continues to thrive, and that all grantee and delegate agencies maintain the highest possible quality in the provision of Head Start services (USDHHS, 1998, p. 2). In 1996, the promotion of a child's social competence became a priority in Head Start's service delivery. Social competence is "the child's everyday effectiveness in dealing with both his or her present environment and later responsibilities in school and life. Social competence takes into account the interrelatedness of social, emotional, cognitive and physical development" (USDHHS, 1998, p. 1).

Head Start programs may either run independently (as a grantee), or through a delegate agency. A delegate agency is a public or private non-profit organization that has been delegated all or part of the responsibility for operating a Head Start (USDHHS, 1998). Regardless of whether or not a particular program has a delegate agency, all Head Start programs are required to have a governing body (either at the program level or at the delegate level). Under Head Start Program Performance Standard 1304.50(a)(1), programs must have a Policy Council (for grantee agencies) or a Policy Committee (for delegate agencies) and a Parent Committee. These governing bodies are responsible for "shared decision-making concerning program design and implementation" (USDHHS, 1998, p. 159). This authority includes the administration of and adherence to all Head Start Program Performance Standards by the grantee and delegate agencies.

Head Start's current revised standards have been in effect since January 1, 1998. The revised standards were developed by over 2,000 individuals, including national experts in child development, national children/family organizations, local community educators, Head Start staff and parents. These standards are reviewed and revised by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and may not fall below levels designated as of 1978 (Head Start, 1999a).

As previously stated, all Head Start organizations must comply with these published requirements. The Head Start standards fall under ten major categories:

1. Child health and development services
2. Education and early childhood development

3. Child health and safety
4. Child nutrition
5. Family partnerships
6. Community partnerships
7. Program governance
8. Management systems and procedures
9. Human resource management
10. Facilities, materials and equipment (USDHHS, 1998).

Under each heading, performance standards are broken down and listed under subheadings, with an introduction to the subheading. Each individual standard has a rationale, guidance, and, where appropriate, related information that cross references the standard with other applicable standards. The guidance is provided to assist programs or program monitors with suggestions in how to implement a standard.

Head Start Performance Standard Example

An example of a standard, rationale and guidance, under the heading Education and Early Childhood Development, subheading (a)Child Development and Education Approach for all Children are provided:

Performance Standard:"(4) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide for the development of each child's skills by: (i) Supporting each child's learning, using various strategies including experimentation, inquiry, observation, play, and exploration

Rationale: "Through meaningful interactions with adults, other children, and a rich environment, children gain knowledge and understanding of the world. Strategies that support the development of cognitive and language skills allow exploration in both indoor and outdoor environments.

Guidance: "It is essential to provide materials and opportunities for learning, and to design meaningful, concrete experiences that promote children's interactions. Adults use a variety of teaching strategies to support children's learning by:...offering a rich variety of experiences, projects, materials, problems, and ideas to extend children's thinking and to support their interests" (USDHHS, 1998, p. 68).

Under program standards, Head Start programs are required to annually review their performance based according to the standards. During this review, programs assess the quality

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of their program and determine action plans for quality improvements. The Policy Council/ Committee and the Parent Committee oversee the evaluation and goal-setting processes.

Every three years, programs are evaluated by an external group to assure that Head Start Performance Standards are being met. New tools are under development for both the self-evaluation and the external evaluation. They were not available for review at the time this report was written.

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VII. Comments and Conclusions

A. Standards

The standards reviewed in this document are thorough and focused on critical factors that affect quality in early childhood environments. They are limited insofar as no outside agency enforces a program's compliance with the standards to ensure quality. This does not detract from the comprehensive nature of the standards. However, if a center were simply to review CWLA, APHA/AAP, ECERS or Head Start standards and determine their own compliance with a set of standards, they would only be engaging in one part of the process that accreditation requires--the self-evaluation. While this is a critical step in monitoring program quality, it is purely subjective on the part of the program. Without a separate mechanism to confirm and enforce compliance with standards, a program is likely to be less inclined to engage in and follow through on quality improvement measures recommended to fully comply with non-enforced standards.

B. Accreditation Processes

In reviewing the accreditation standards as compared in the charts in this document, many observations can be made about each process's strengths and weaknesses.

NAEYC

NAEYC's standards are most focused on how quality affects child outcomes, as supported by the research base verifying the quality-enhancing nature of the NAEYC accreditation process. NAEYC's standards are written and set forth to educate to the organization seeking accreditation. An explanation on implementation is provided following each standard. Through its standards and explanations, NAEYC attempts to teach programs about developmentally appropriate practice and how to implement this practice into every day program operations.

Some of NAEYC's standards appear to be redundant. This is particularly evident in the charts, where interpreted summaries are provided. For example, Standard A-1 includes the statement, "Teachers actively seek meaningful conversation with children" and Standard A-3 says "Teachers converse frequently with children..." (NAEYC, 1998, p. 17-18). However, the standards are also very specific (not evident in the summaries in the charts), giving guidance on what it means to "converse frequently" or in a manner that is "meaningful for children". The self-study process is broken into many parts, so that the different standards are evaluated through a variety of measures: checklists, questionnaires, classroom evaluations, etc.

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NAFCC

NAFCC's standards are focused on addressing quality issues specific to providing care in a family home. NAFCC gears its process and standards to its audience (family child care providers) and makes accreditation attainable without lowering standards to a point that quality is compromised.

Compared to NAEYC standards, NAFCC's standards fall on the higher end between meeting and being slightly below NAEYC standards. NAFCC standards are nearly equivalent to NAEYC's in the areas of Administration, Evaluation, Interactions Among Teachers and Children, Curriculum, and Physical Environment. NAFCC standards for Health and Safety, Relationships Among Teachers and Families, Nutrition, and Staff Qualifications are below those of NAEYC. NAEYC's staffing ratios are not comparable to those of NAFCC, because they cannot be applied in the same manner. Often, family day care providers are caring for children of varying age groups, from infants to school-aged children. However, the number of children for which they are caring is very small, and is restricted by local licensing requirements. The NAEYC ratios simply do not apply.

Within its standards, NAFCC offers many concrete suggestions to providers on items and issues such as: suggested materials for large and fine motor skills, language and literacy development, art, math, science, dramatic play, and real toys; contents of a first aid kit; a home safety and health checklist: and outdoor safety and health checklist; areas to cover in written policies; and types of records to be maintained.

NECPA

Relying on key indicators to predict quality across a large number of variables allows NECPA to provide a less labor-intensive self-evaluation process. In the comparison charts, NECPA appears to fall short in contrast to NAEYC standards, because NECPA tests for fewer discrete quality characteristics than does NAEYC. This is the nature of the key indicator quality method. A wealth of research was devoted to the development of NECPA's accreditation standards and process to verify that is up to par with NAEYC's standards and process.

NECPA could benefit, however, from a clearer education to programs seeking accreditation about the key indicator methodology. Specifically, NECPA should clarify in its materials which key quality indicators are predictors of non-tested quality indicators.

In the current comparison, NECPA standards rank midway between meeting and falling below NAEYC's standard levels. In most cases this occurred because NECPA had not specifically addressed an area that NAEYC had. NECPA's standards are roughly the same as

NAEYC's in the areas of: Evaluation, Staff Qualifications, Health and Safety, Curriculum, and Physical Environment. NECPA's standards for Staffing ratios exceeded NAEYC's, as they recommend lower group maximum sizes in many age groups. NECPA's standards fell below NAEYC's in the areas of Interactions Among Teachers and Children, Administration, Relationships Among Teachers and Families, and Nutrition.

COA

COA accreditation is good option for programs that offer other human services in addition to child day care. The generic standards are extremely rigorous for program operations. However, the standards specific to child day care are not very detailed. Although the manner in which the standards are measured is detailed, the actual standards themselves are not extensive and leave a great deal open for interpretation about what is developmentally appropriate in child care programs. The standards do not focus heavily on child-outcomes; rather the standards are focused on structural and process quality issues.

Like the other two processes, overall COA standards rest between meeting and falling below NAEYC's standards. COA's standards meet those of NAEYC in the areas of: Staffing ratios, Administration, Relationships Among Teachers and Families, Health and Safety, and Staff Qualifications. COA's Evaluation standards slightly exceed NAEYC's standards. COA ranks below NAEYC in addressing Physical Environment, Curriculum, Interactions Among Teachers and Children, and Nutrition.

It should be noted that COA's generic standards are far more extensive in the area of administration and operations than any of the other accreditation processes reviewed. In the specific comparison between COA and NAEYC standards, COA has many standards not addressed by NAEYC. This is relevant for the supporter of accreditation reflecting a strong operational practice.

C. Public Policy Impact

Accreditation is increasingly recognized as an important public policy vehicle for promoting and assuring quality. States are providing funds, rewards, and incentives to encourage accreditation, including grants to achieve and maintain accreditation, providing bonus payments to accredited proviers who accept low-income children, converting facility and equipment loans to grants for accredited programs, and increasing tax write-offs for employers and parents who support and use accreditated programs.

To facilitate appropriate accreditation public policy, some states have addressed the range of accreditation processes and identified criteria that accreditation systems must meet in order for

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them to be recognized, approved, and supported by the state. In Oklahoma, for example, accredited child care programs may receive a higher reimbursement rate, and those seeking accreditation may receive technical and financial assistance to secure accreditation. In addition, employers receive child care tax credit expenses for accredited programs. Recognizing that there are a variety of accreditation processes, Oklahoma has set forth specific criteria that must be met before it will accept an accreditation process. The Oklahoma criteria follow:

1. Demonstrated fiscal and administrative capability for administering an accreditation program
2. A nationally established program that has conducted at least 100 post-pilot-test accreditation visits
3. Comprehensive self-evaluation that includes parents, staff and program administrators, and that promotes self-improvement
4. On-site peer review validators with academic qualifications and formal training by the accreditation group
5. Accreditation decisions made by experts in the field after a review of all documentation, and based on boundaries and criteria established by the organization
6. A maximum accreditation period of three years with guidelines for a re-accreditation process and annual reporting of improvements and other changes
7. Validators, training procedures and instruments used in the process are evaluated for reliability and validity on an on-going basis
8. Administration policies and system evaluation procedures are in place to avoid conflicts of interest and address such issues as deferred status, withdrawal of accreditation, appeal processes and complaints
9. Program standards must be based on research about program quality and are periodically reviewed and updated. They must be at a level higher than minimum licensing requirements and include the following areas:
    - Staff ratios and group size limits for each age
    - Staff qualifications and training
    - Age-appropriate program
    - Minimum staff qualifications and role progression
    - Health and safety
    - Parent/program relationships: involvement of parents

(Oklahoma Department of Human Services, 1999).

All four of the accreditation processes reviewed in this report comply with these public policy criteria.

D. Conclusion

We conclude that all of the accreditation processes are substantially similar to NAEYC accreditation, which is the only one of the accreditation processes to have been independently evaluated and assessed. But the question remains, is one accreditation process *better* than another in assuring quality in an early childhood setting? Each process has strengths and weaknesses. Each process has a body of standards to predict some aspect(s) of quality. In seeking to best support child outcomes, NAEYC stands out as the appropriate accreditation process. In efforts to ensure proper program administration, COA accreditation is a clear leader. NAFCC addresses quality issues facing family day care providers, and should be supported as an acceptable accreditation process for those programs. NECPA is a more simplistic process, possibly a better option for programs with limited resources to devote to the accreditation process.

Lilian Katz suggests that there are several viewpoints that should be taken to assess the quality of a child care program: a top-down perspective, a bottom-up perspective, an outside-inside perspective, and an inside perspective (Katz, 1993). The presence of these perspectives in the self-evaluation instruments can also be taken into account for evaluating accreditation processes. Each perspective accounts for the various groups served by a program--adults in general, children, families, and staff respectively. The first approach, top-down, is the approach most typically taken; it focuses on previously identified structural aspects of the program. The bottom-up perspective asks questions of a child in the child care setting to try to determine what it "feel(s) like to be a child in this environment" (Katz, 1993, p.1). The third suggested perspective, outside-inside, accounts for characteristics of relationships between parents and staff. The final perspective is that of the adults on the inside of the program--the staff.

All four accreditation processes evaluate from three of Katz's perspectives: top-down, outside-inside, and inside. NAEYC's process is the most successful at addressing the bottom-up perspective, as it has the most comprehensive requirements to effect child outcomes. COA's accreditation standards pay little attention to this perspective, providing very limited direction towards child-outcomes. NECPA and NAFCC's standards fall in between NAEYC and COA in covering this perspective.

Overall, one concept is certain: accreditation enforces quality in early childhood settings, and all programs that care for children should be supported in achieving the high quality required for accreditation.

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IX. Appendix A--Elements for Defining/Measuring Quality

There has been a great deal of research devoted to defining quality in early childhood care settings. Although a single, concrete definition does not exist, quality types and variables effecting quality outcomes have been identified. The types and variables are listed here, with their respective sources, as they are common threads among different accreditation standards.

Type of Quality (Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995, p. 21)

- structural quality (the quality of inputs to child care provision)
- process quality (overall quality of services)
- child outcome (that which is the result of the quality of child care provision)

Basic Structural Dimensions (Phillips & Howes, 1987):

- high adult-to-child ratios
- small group size
- extensive care-giver training, education and experience with children

This research found that "structural features of child care appear to affect the dynamic environment that captures children's actual experiences in child care, which in turn predicts children's development in child care" (Phillips & Howes, 1987, p. 8).

Further Structural Dimensions (Bush & Phillips, 1996):

- the existence of program outcomes and goals
- the environment's resemblance to the child's home environment
- the program's orientation to the community
- the coherence and continuity of the program

According to these researchers, "quality is a relative term which can vary according to socio-economic and cultural factors, perspectives of the stakeholder (the person evaluating the program quality), age of the child, and the beliefs and role of the government" (Bush & Phillps, 1996, p. 75).

Structure and Process Dimensions (Kagan, Cohen & Neuman, 1996):

- parent engagement in the program
- professional development of the staff
- licensing and accreditation of the program
- funding and finance sources behind the program
- governance within the program

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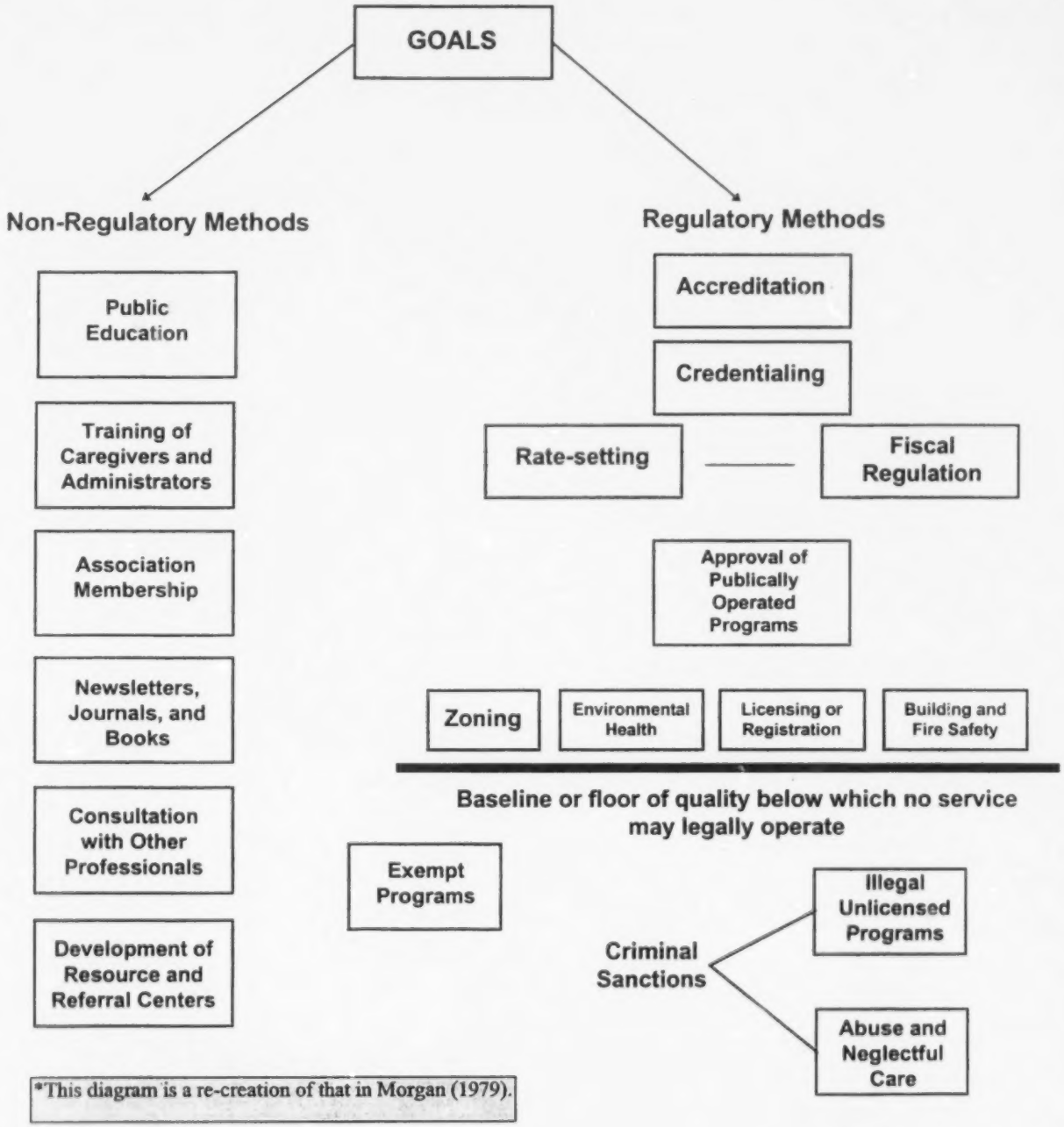
X. Appendix B--Morgan's Methods for Achieving Quality Care*



*This diagram is a re-creation of that in Morgan (1979).

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XI. Appendix C--Accreditation Information

To receive further information on the accreditation processes and program standards, contact the individual organizations.

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1509 16th St., NW
Washington, DC 20036-1426
Phone: 800-424-2460 Fax: 202-328-1846 Email: academy@naeyc.org
Web Address: http://www.naeyc.org

National Association for Family Child Care
525 SW 5th St., Suite A
Des Moines, IA 30309-4501
Phone: 515-282-8192 Fax: 515-282-9117 Email: nafcc@nafcc.org
Web Address: http://www.nafcc.org

National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
1016 Rosser St.
Conyers,,GA 30012
Phone: 800-505-9878 Fax: 770-388-7772

Council of Accreditation for Services to Families and Children
120 Wall Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY, 10005
Phone: 212-797-3000 Fax: 212-797-1428 Email: coanet@aol.com
Web Address: http://www.coanet.org

Child Welfare League of America
440 First St., NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20001-2085
Phone: 202-638-2952 Fax: 202-638-4004 Email: webweaver@cwla.org
Web Address: http://www.cwla.org

American Public Health Association
800 I Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
Web Address: http://www.apha.org

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American Association of Pediatrics
141 NW Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
Phone: 800-433-9016 Fax: 847-228-5095
Web Address: http://www.aap.org

To order a copy of the APHA/AAP National Health and Safety Performance Standards, contact
National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care
800-598-KIDS
Web Address: http://www.nrc.uchsc.edu

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
(also for ITERS/FCERS/SACERS)
Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center
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